



A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE GAPS BETWEEN ACADEMIC LEADERS AND ADMINISTRATORS IN A UNIVERSITY SPACE

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined the perceived gaps between academic leaders and administrators. This descriptive study was undertaken with a sample of 15 administrators working in different capacities as joint registrars, deputy registrars and assistant registrars in a state university of Delhi. The data was collected using structured interviews and was subsequently analyzed using frequency and percentage analysis. The analysis revealed that there needs to be a platform where the administrators and academic leaders jointly develop the shared future vision for the growth of the institution. Secondly, need based orientation programmes need to be organised for academic leaders especially to acquaint them with respect to handling of financial matters and make them shun the attitude of superiority with respect to administrators. Lastly it is important that administrators not only pro-actively listen to the grievances of academic leaders but also provide solutions such that the efficiency of the institution in terms of outcomes increases as a whole.

KEYWORDS: Leadership, Challenges, Outcomes, Efficiency.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is undoubtedly a tall order which requires the necessary personality traits and values that enable one to succeed. A lot has been written about the different types of leadership such as charismatic leadership, transactional leadership, servant leadership, transformational leadership etc but a domain that has not received as much attention is academic leadership. It is important to understand the meaning of the term academic leadership in order to understand the need and relevance of this research. The accepted definition of academic leadership given by Leaming (1998) is that academic leadership included 'the skills to motivate others to take certain courses of action, to persuade others that prescribed tasks much be done on time and in a particular way, and to garner respect of others, especially those with whom one works and/or associates" (p. 29). In the higher education landscape in India the administrators include the non teaching staff from top of the hierarchy such as the Board of Management members, the Vice Chancellor, the Registrar, Controller of Examination, Controller of Finance Joint Registrars, Deputy Registrars, Assistant Registrars etc who are directly responsible for admissions, examinations, recruitment, security, estate management, financial management etc. On the other hand the leadership at the level of departments such as the Departmental Chairs, Deans and Directors etc who are solely responsible for leadership essentially in the area of scholastics, co-scholastics and research are classified as academic leaders. Academic leaders in universities are responsible for creating a shared vision for their departments, leading the team towards achieving the outcomes of teaching-learning and of most importantly promoting the cause of quality research in terms of funding and publications in reputed journals. The personality attributes of these leaders that are agreed by most practitioners in the field of academic leadership include: Vision, Focus, Scholarship, Integrity, Compassion, Resourcefulness, Empathy, Courage, Creativity to name a few. It is not an easy task to be a successful academic leader in these times of globalization where education is nothing but a commodity or good. It is therefore imperative to look at how these leaders are perceived by the administrators in order to bridge the gap between these two important pillars i.e.

administration and academics. The present study was conceived to identify the perceived gaps as seen by administrators with respect to the working of academic leaders in a university ecosystem. In order to understand all the dimensions of academic leadership it was important to engage in the review of relevant studies in the area as presented below.

REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

Siddiqui (2011) In this paper the author has tried to develop a conceptual framework by linking the three variables namely academic leadership, motivation and organizational effectiveness. The model highlights that good academic leadership in areas of research and administration both has a direct motivational effect on faculty members. This in turn is instrumental in increasing their organizational effectiveness. The Framework has been developed after a meta-analysis of a number of studies that were based on the above three variables. A major limitation of the model developed is that it has not been developed without taking into consideration the contextual factors therefore its large-scale applicability remains questionable.

Richards (2011) Explored the leadership with respect to learning in higher education from the perspective of students. The sample comprised around 54 final year students of computing. Data was collected using a descriptive questionnaire. The main findings of the study was that students perceive the teacher who is the leader positively and that has a bearing on their learning. The students viewed teachers who were passionate, well-organized, easily accessible and very knowledgeable as instrumental in their learning. The study concluded that in order to be a leader the students count on the best a teacher can visualize the role as by imagining the kind of teacher they would yearn to have.

Gmelch (2013) Undertook a study that dealt with the need and dynamics of development of academic leaders. The study was conducted using the survey method wherein the respondents undertook the leadership program and based on the comparison of the pre-test and post-test scores based on Focus Group questions three important realms of academic leadership namely

conceptual understanding, reflective practice and skill development were focused on. It was found that academic leadership forum (ALF) program led the change in the leadership from transactional to transformational in most of the respondents wherein the respondents understood the political and symbolic leadership frames in terms of their leadership style, the academic leaders felt more prepared for their leadership roles, the support from peers and mentors proved to be a motivating force for guidance and critical reflection, the course proved to be a platform for providing continuous learning opportunities, support of administrators was considered a must for the academic leaders to flourish and lastly leaders should be well acquainted with the ethical, moral and spiritual dimension of leadership such that their worldview improves by interacting with leaders outside the institutional and national boundaries.

Drange (2015) Explored the dilemma of leadership in research universities in the United States based on the surveys and interviews conducted with academic leaders in research universities. The study concluded that a powerful culture of research in these universities leads to less value being placed on academic leadership positions. As a result of undervaluing academic leadership there is also less amount of support at an interpersonal level in terms of mentoring and giving feedback to each other as academic leaders. Most of the academic leaders agreed that they follow the footsteps of the role models whom they had encountered in their professional lives. Lack of support systems and more value on scholarship and research leads to many academics not being inclined to take up leadership roles beyond a term or two. The study concluded that it is imperative for research universities to institute policies or practices and programs that motivate academic leaders right from the early stages in order to have a more competent and well motivated academic leadership in near future.

Hamidifar and Ebrahimi (2016) Conducted a case study of a private University in Iran with respect to academic leadership. The barriers to meritocracy in academic leadership were outlined to be centralized power structures, deeply embedded hierarchical organization, budget constraints, lack of effective communication and poor staffing policies. The study concluded that it is important to organize need based workshops and action based projects in the realm of capacity building in leadership. The program should cover all three stages of leadership development namely the identification of gaps between performance and needed skills and competencies, define the scope and level of the programme and lastly developing capacities in administration and thus increasing performance of institutions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the expectations of the university administration from academic leaders.
2. To gauge the existing gaps between administration and academic leaders.

Research Design

The study was descriptive in nature as it tried to explore the perceived gaps between academic leaders and administrators. The survey method was employed to collect data from a sample of 15 administrators working in different capacities as joint registrars, deputy registrars and assistant registrars. A structured interview schedule was used to collect data. The data was analysed using frequency and percentage analysis.

DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

- The study was delimited to one state university of Delhi.
- Only 15 administrators were selected purposively (looking at the specific purpose of the study) to collect data looking at the time frame of the study.

Analysis of interview data collected from administrators with respect to objective one: To examine expectations of the administration from the academic leaders.(N=15)

1. Efficiency of Academic Leaders in discharge of their responsibilities on a scale of 1-10

S.No	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	0-2	0	0
2.	2-4	0	0
3.	4-6	0	0
4.	6-8	12	80%
5	8-10	3	20%

Findings:

Most of the administrators felt that academic leaders are efficient in the discharge of their responsibilities.

2. Mechanism of conveying shared vision and expectations to academic leaders

S.No	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	No mechanism or Platform in place	12	80%
2.	Vision decided and conveyed,so no shared vision	1	7%
3.	Only in Meetings Sometimes	2	13%

Findings:

Majority of the administrators were of the view that there is no mechanism or platform to convey the shared vision and expectations to academic leaders. 13% felt that only in few meetings the shared vision is discussed occasionally. 7% felt that vision is decided by few at the top of the administrative hierarchy so there is nothing like a shared vision that is decided upon and conveyed.

3. Fulfillment of academic responsibilities by academic leaders as perceived by administrators on a scale of 0-10.

S.No	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	0-2	0	0
2.	2-4	0	0
3.	4-6	0	0
4.	6-8	13	87%
5.	8-10	2	13%

Findings:

13% of the administrators felt a very high degree of satisfaction with respect to academic leaders fulfilling the responsibilities accorded to them. While 87% of the administrators were also quite satisfied with the working of the academic leaders.

Analysis of data collected from administrators pertaining to objective 2(N=15): To gauge the existing gaps between administration and academic leaders.

1. Common challenges faced by academic leaders in the institution

S.No	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Problems of Space for Research Laboratories	4	27%
2.	Lack of Infrastructural Facilities	11	73%

Findings:

The administrators feel that the two challenges academic leaders face are :paucity of space with respect to research laboratories and lack of infrastructural facilities such as faculty rooms and classrooms.

2. Redressal Mechanism for Problems faced by Academic Leaders

S.No	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Patient Hearing to Solve the Problem together	6	40%
2.	Providing Genuine timelines for resolution of problem	5	33%
3	Providing solution with respect to the problem faced	4	27%

Findings:

40% of the administrators addressed the problem by sitting together with the academic leaders to find a solution.33% gave suggestions and genuine timelines to address the problem and 27% provided the solution to the problem faced themselves.

3. Challenges faced by administrators in dealing with academic leaders

S.No	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Attitudinal Problems thinking they are superior to administration	3	20%
2.	Lack of knowledge on Financial matters	7	47%
3.	No challenge at all	5	33%

Findings:

47% of the administrators felt that academic leaders lack requisite knowledge of financial matters.33% felt that there is no challenge at all in dealing with academic leaders and 20% reported that the academic leaders feel they are superior to administration and therefore it causes friction due to this attitude.

4. Suggestions for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of academic leaders in discharge of their academic-administrative responsibilities

S.No	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	This attitude that academicians require no orientation for discharge of their leadership responsibilities needs to change.	1	7%
2.	Need based Orientation should be provided before being entrusted with academic leadership roles.	10	67%
3.	Orientation does not make you capable overnight ,it is about the right responsibility given to the best suited person	4	26%

Findings:

67% of the administrators felt that the efficiency of academic leaders can be increased by providing need based orientation to them before giving academic responsibilities.26% felt that it is important that responsibilities are given looking at the competence of the academic leaders for better results and 7% felt that the attitude that academic leaders need no orientation needs to change in order to increase their efficiency and effectiveness.

Based on the above findings the perceived gaps between administration and academic leaders may be summarised as:

- The academic leaders perceive bureaucratic hurdles in clearance of files as a major challenge while the administrators do not perceive it to be a challenge for academic leaders.
- Academic leaders do not feel any need for them to be oriented with respect to the discharge of their responsibilities while administrators feel that academic leaders need to be given need based orientation with respect to the discharge of their responsibilities.
- Academic Leaders need to be involved in the development of the vision and mission of the university such that they feel the responsibility for the shared vision.
- There should be a platform or forum where academic leaders and administrators meet and discuss their problems and challenges collectively.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- Majority of the administrators were of the view that there is no mechanism or platform to convey the shared vision and expectations to academic leaders. 13% felt that only in few meetings the shared vision is discussed occasionally.7% felt that vision is decided by few at the top of the administrative hierarchy so there is nothing like a shared vision that is decided upon and conveyed.
- 47% of the administrators felt that academic leaders lack requisite knowledge of financial matters.33% felt that there is no challenge at all in dealing with academic leaders and 20% reported that the academic leaders feel they are superior to administration and therefore it causes friction between them due to this attitude.
- Academic leaders do not feel any need for them to be oriented with respect to the discharge of their responsibilities while administrators feel that academic leaders need to be given need based orientation with respect to the discharge of their responsibilities.
- Academic Leaders need to be involved in the development of the vision and mission of the university such that they feel the responsibility for the shared vision.
- There should be a platform or forum where academic leaders and administrators meet and discuss their problems and challenges collectively.

CONCLUSION

For an institution to flourish the administration and academic leaders need to work in sync. It is imperative that working in sync entails a thorough understanding of the expectations on either side, finding ways and means to achieve them and then evaluating the outcomes that have been achieved. This study threw light on three critical factors to increase the effectiveness of academic leaders. Firstly, it is important that before entrusting the academic leaders with the responsibility of academic leadership they are given a need based orientation which equips them with the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies to move towards the achievement of the requisite performance goals. Secondly, the administrators need to involve the academic leaders towards the development of the vision statement of the institution such that they have a shared understanding and ownership of it. Thirdly, it is also vital to break away from hierarchies such that neither the administrators nor the academic leaders have a feeling of superiority over the other. Academic

leaders and administrators need to listen, address and find solutions to problems/challenges plaguing the institution together in to move towards benchmarked performance.

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